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THE FEAR IN TAPIRAPÉ CULTURE

Herbert Baldus

121 Fear, although its biological aspects connect mankind with the animals, assumes among ourselves characteristics which by tradition vary from people to people, that is, cultural traits. Socially determined differences exist in the exteriorization of fear as well as in its causes.

In certain cultures one should not show fear; in others there is nothing to prevent one from exhibiting it. There are peoples and cultural epochs which like to see their women habitually frightened and so to establish a contrast with the calmness of the men. In many South American tribes the women easily weep, *tremble, cry or grow because of any danger, real or supposed, and are or pretend* to be especially frightened by certain masked dances and other ceremonies performed by the men.[1] Goethe, in "Faust," when Margaret faints, exclaiming "Nachbarin! Euer Fläschchen!" ("Neighbour, your smelling-bottle!"), alludes to a common custom of his time in Europe. The modern European woman who no longer uses smelling-salts shows that such manifestations of terror are not conditioned by nature, but by culture. As regards the real female constitution it may be mentioned that "in an important study made during World War II, *Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier* (1942), Dr. R. D. Gillespie reported that in the heavily bombed areas of London and Kent almost 70 per cent more men broke down and became psychiatric casualties than women!"[2]

In certain cultures death is feared, in others, not. Circumstances which produce feelings of inadequacy and consequently fear in certain societies don't exist in others. The so-called "imaginary fear"[3] which creates phantoms is found among most primitive peoples and is generally limited, among the peoples with European languages, to the less educated classes.

153 171 The Tapirapé differ from other South American tribes by exteriorising the fear in both sexes, by the frequency and ease of such exteriorization, and by the multiplicity of causes for fear. The naturalness with which on several occasions Kamairabé, the most important Tapirapé leader, said to me: "Akyisé, I am *afraid*," is only comparable with the almost automatic manner of the Tapirapé's using the interjection "Akí" when feeling any pain, even the sting of a mosquito later. This caused me to think frequently of the contrast presented in all that by Indians I knew in the Paraguayan Chaco, for instance of the apparent impassibility of the Chamacoco. It is true that the Tapirapé calm down with the same ease with which they are alarmed. A few words of mine were enough to make Kamairabé laugh again, speaking carelessly with his wife about other things. I had the impression that among the Chaco Indians the emotions penetrated deeper, while among the Tapirapé they were like slight circles on the surface of a pond into which a little stone had been thrown, circles which soon disappear into the distance.

152 346 But among these Tupian Indians of the Araguaya basin, the exteriorization of fear is not restricted to interjections. We find it expressed in attitudes and institutions. We feel it, although masked, in the mechanical smile with which, from earliest infancy, they greet the person who speaks to them. We suspect it still in other aspects of their characteristics.

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Fear was present in the formalization of quarrels full of hatred, a formalization which obliged the opponents to avoid direct contact. They had to remain hidden from one another and not interrupt the speech of their antagonist, but only reply when he had finished. One such quarrel began in the afternoon of June 27, 1935. Kamairahó lay in his hammock with open eyes and didn't answer when several people called him. Maninohó, the eldest man of the neighbouring house, began to pronounce insults. He stays inside his house. The entrances of the houses are so arranged that it is impossible to look from the interior of one house into the interior of another.[4] Kamairahó's wife stays outside between the two houses without looking towards either of them. She faces the men's house in the centre of the village and replies to Maninohó with extraordinary gravity, in a level voice and with calm gestures. They are discussing a question of shamanism. Maninohó seems to be doing the provoking. The other persons present continue with their habitual activities, neither laughing nor speaking. After a while Maninohó's aggressiveness seems to increase. Kamairahó's wife joins her husband and the eldest man of her house places himself close to the entrance but inside, holding a club and railing violently in a loud and monotonous voice. When he finishes, profound silence rules for some moments. Then the other replies in the same tone. Never does one interrupt the other. This rule is also observed when two Tapirapé women have a quarrel as well as among other South American tribes.[5] The quarrel between the two men, one always hidden from the other, lasted until sunset. Late that night the old man of Kamairahó's house, where I was also living, asked me for my electric torch and went with his wife for water by a very roundabout way in order to avoid the proximity of Maninohó's house. These precautionary measures—the lamp, the company of his wife, and the détour—reveal clearly the fear he had of the adversary. Supposing then that fear has contributed to create the institution of formalized quarrels we may consider it a factor of socialization. But is it only a tribal behaviour pattern or also fear that causes the victim of theft to abstain from any exteriorized reaction? Frequently I observed that the theft of some thing obtained from the white men, for instance a necklace of glass beads, was known immediately in the whole village; the victim, however, suffers in silence without any demonstration and doesn't attempt any revenge.

As an institution which is essentially a product of fear appears that of the shamans. Non-existent in certain South American tribes and little developed in others, it is so important to the Tapirapé that they informed me of certain local groups having renounced their independence and joined the inhabitants of another village because there were no more shamans among them.[6] This becomes credible when one considers Charles Wagley's[7] quotation of one of his informants' words: "Without our pané, all we Tapirapé die." According to the same author,[8] "the greatest prestige which Tapirapé culture offers accrues to the shaman." This means that the first place in Tapirapé society belongs to the person who defends the community against the ever terrible dangers of the supernatural world. It is collective fear which gives him this status. But the easy and continuous contact with the forces of destruction makes the shaman for his part also a man to be feared, and consequently exposes him to other dangers, to dangers which we would not call supernatural. When cases of death occur in the village, and especially several in a short time, it is usual to attribute the cause to a shaman and therefore many shamans are murdered. Then it is also collective fear which, in such cases, moves a Tapirapé to defend the community

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132 152 against the supposed menace and to kill the shaman who is suspected of having 756 become an evil sorcerer.

152 Though, also as regards the institution of shamanism, fear works out as a 194 factor of socialization by exercising the dangers to the tribal life, we cannot say 645 the same about the fear which produces in many Tapirapé a disposition to adapt themselves complacently to the white man. During my stay in 1935, in the village called Tampiitawa, I could distinguish clearly between the great group of timorous people led by Kamairabó who received with open arms all that came from our civilization, and a smaller group composed of decided and valorous people who didn't want anything to do with us. So there were two opposite trends in their "foreign policy" and consequently germs of tribal disintegration.

123 Of the direct causes of fear I want to mention the following: The Tapirapé 152 were alarmed by my fury when I saw a man whipping his wife. To relate this 595 case means to confess a most ethnocentric and therefore in no way ethnological behaviour. But I think that in order to be an ethnologist it is necessary to be able not to be an ethnologist in certain situations. At noon on July 15 I see that [592] behind the house in which I was living with Kamairabó and thirty other [562] Indians, the athletic Inamorêo, nearly twenty-two years old, is beating a woman. With a cane and the blade of his knife he is whipping his wife. She is so small and tender that she seems to be a child in spite of being perhaps twenty years old. I run towards the couple to interfere. The little woman is weeping despairingly, but doesn't go away. The man tries to tug her towards the house which is their house and mine also. She struggles. There he enters the house. Finally she follows. I enter also. The man holds the knife. I have nothing in my hands, but I am bound by my upbringing; I am the weapon of my culture and my culture is my weapon. I say to Inamorêo that people do not beat a woman like a dog. (I refer to this animal because frequently, among the Tapirapé, it can only thus be prevented from eating the people's food.) Inamorêo pronounces insults and his wife sobs. Now I explain to all the people present that beating a woman is a bad thing. Later, when I am sitting together with Kamairabó and his wife, I tell them that if a white man should whip his wife, another white man would kill him with a revolver. Jokingly I add: "If you, Kamairabó, beat your wife, I have to kill you with my revolver." With these words I go away.

[576] After a while Kamairabó passed me with a depressed face. I ask him:
125 "Where are you going?" Without smiling he answers: "I am afraid of you."
152 I embrace him, I kiss him impetuously in the Tapirapé manner, that is, rubbing my nose against his nose; but all this is in vain. He waits patiently until I let him go, continues walking, and tells the men and women whom he is passing that he is afraid of me, the white man who kills those who beat women. May I observe here that I always went around without a weapon among the Tapirapé, keeping the revolver, as Kamairabó knew, in my hammock hanging close to his hammock, and even there the revolver was at hand only to be at the disposal of the same Kamairabó in order to protect him against the event of nocturnal attack by the Kayapó Indians, the most terrible neighbours. Kamairabó enters his house and immediately from there sounds an agitated and long talk. With the speed of lightning the news spreads through the village that Kamairabó is afraid of me and is lying in his hammock and that I would kill with a revolver the husbands who whip their wives. A middle-aged woman joins me, saying: "I am afraid of you." I assure her again that I am not bad, that, on the con-

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trary, I am good, and in order to demonstrate it, I embrace cordially a man on her side so that I don't need to embrace her. And I say to my English companion who at this moment joins me: "Certain research-workers who were killed by the Indians with whom they lived, as, for instance, Boggiani among the Chamakoko, were murdered only through fear." At that instant, as if he had understood my words, the man I have just embraced asks me if the Shavante really have killed the white man by the name of Father John and if they have murdered him with a club. I don't know from where the Tapirapé had received this information and if his question represented a reaction or only conversation. What I know is that the man couldn't have understood my comment about the murders through fear.

An hour later I see Kamairahó going to the brook carrying two calabash rattles which he had obtained from the Karajá neighbours, but never used. I follow him and ask him what he intends to do with the rattles. He explains that they are dirty and that he wants to clean them with water, and adds: "When you go away and I remain here, the rattles will go with you." He continues with a mournful face. Besides, everyone looks sad, and when I enter our hut, I am not received as usual with the friendly exclamation: "You arrive!" But, looking to this or that person, I immediately receive a polite smile. Even at night Kamairahó says to the Englishman that he is still afraid of me, and when my companion reassures him, confirming the jocose character of my threat, he is invited immediately by Kamairahó to eat bananas and by other inhabitants of the house to have kauí, a fermented drink, in payment for this consolation. Meanwhile Inamoréo, who had beaten his wife, has already gone peacefully to sleep with her in the hammock and explains later that he whipped her only with the arrow—which is not true. I invite Kamairahó for a dinner of deer. He eats well, but with a sad face complaining of a headache. He receives aspirin.

It is necessary to consider that the fear described above may have been caused less by the threat with the revolver than by the agitated manner with which I expressed my indignation and which contrasts with Tapirapé behaviour. Even Kamairahó's wife, who used to quarrel much, always pronounced insults in a monotonous voice and with apparent calm, quite different, for instance, from the Karajá women who shout without reserve. But it may be mentioned that the Tapirapé were also afraid of the Englishman when a woman had stolen a great quantity of kitchen oil from him, putting it in her hair, and when dogs of the village tore his towel to pieces. And my companion was less explosive than I!

Graver causes of fear are the Kayapó attacks. I have already mentioned that, on account of these, I was asked to sleep armed. When a rumour maker is talking about the approach of these Indians, all the village is immediately alarmed. And there are reasons for this, because in 1947, soon after my second visit to the Tapirapé, these warlike neighbours assaulted the village, plundered it, and burned it, killing and kidnapping women.

Fear was produced also by the eclipse of the moon on 15th of June, 1935. When at night I was awakened with the words "chahy vuy" "moon blood," all the people were dejected and the men were talking only in low tones. Really, the moon appears dark red like congulated blood. Next day everybody was still preoccupied with the phenomenon, considering it a bad omen of carnage.

But while the eclipse was an uncommon cause of fear, there were other causes in every moment and in any place, for the Tapirapé lives surrounded by malevolent spirits. Here is the so-called "imaginary fear" regarding which Mira y López[9] observes that "even the bravest warriors, able to throw themselves

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in the open against a rampart of fire or lances, recede terrified in view of the suspicion of a tenuous and invisible enemy." In fact, the Tapirapé who opposes the jaguar with only bow and club as I had occasion to observe, and who is not afraid of dying, as they frequently assured me, is terrified by the presence of the souls of the dead and of other bad beings. It is not only the soul of a dead shaman which causes fear. I knew a kind father who became afraid of the soul of his beloved little child when this was deceased. And whoever is not a shaman feels a dread of dreaming while asleep, because during the dream he has to travel through the dangerous supernatural world. And not infrequently boys who wanted to drink water at night in the nearby brook asked me to go with them, because a ghost had been seen taking a bath. Unfortunately, whenever I arrived, the well-scrubbed ghost had already gone away. Frequently the boys sang loudly when going to the brook at night in order to calm their fear as I have observed in Europe when children went for something in a dark cellar.

Although the Tapirapé didn't react in any way against the fear produced by the eclipse, they were not always so passive as regards the fear caused by the white men, the Kayapó, and the spirits. When my English companion fell ill, they didn't hesitate in demanding his departure, and when a little girl of the house where I was living fell sick, all the people around me wore a threatening air as if I had been the magic author of the disease. The fear inspired by the Kayapó was combated not only by the Tapirapé holding clubs during the nocturnal collective dances, but also by their parodying their neighbours by a pantomime which represented a supposed attack against peaceful tribesmen. The fear of the spirits gives not only great prestige to the shaman, official protector against them, but also puts in the hand of every Tapirapé a torch which he agitates without interruption if by night he has to go out of the house in order to relieve himself.

So for the frightened Tapirapé also, life is struggle, action and reaction, fear and wrath. And this fearful people is the gayest I ever found in my life, and Kamairahó, the pessimist who more than anyone declared himself to be afraid, had a glad smile on his face everytime when I saw him awake in the morning.

São Paulo, Brazil.

Notes

1. Cf. Herbert Baldus: *Ensaios de Etnologia Brasileira*. S. Paulo, 1937, pp. 156–158.
2. Ashley Montagu: *The Natural Superiority of Women*. London, 1954, p. 92.
3. Emilio Mira y López: *Quatro gigantes da alma*. 3a. edição, Rio de Janeiro, 1955, pp. 39–40.
4. Cf. Herbert Baldus: Os Tapirapé. *Revista do Arquivo Municipal*, 110: 192, 1946. S. Paulo.
5. Cf. Amilcar A. Botelho de Magalhães: *Pelas serras do Brasil*, 2a. edição, S. Paulo, 1941, pp. 497–498; Martin Gusinde: *Die Feuerlandindianer, I: Die Selk'nam*, Mödling bei Wien, 1931, pp. 456–458.
6. Cf. Baldus: *Ensaios de Etnologia Brasileira*, p. 86.
7. Xamanismo tapirapé (Tapirapé Shamanism), *Boletim do Museu Nacional*, n.s., Antropologia, 3: 79, 1943. Rio de Janeiro.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Op. cit., p. 39.